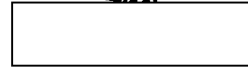




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Iraq: New Challenges on the Domestic Front

- Increased Iranian encouragement and support for Kurdish rebels have led to the fiercest fighting in Iraq's mountainous north in recent years. Under Iran's sponsorship, rival Kurdish dissident groups have cooperated in joint military operations—sometimes with Iranian irregular forces—against government, economic, and military targets.
- Concerned over the growing threat, Baghdad reinforced its forces and launched an intensive campaign from April to late June to eliminate guerrilla strongholds and resettle large numbers of their local sympathizers. Since then, the regime has taken a more conciliatory approach, including reopened negotiations with a main Kurdish rebel group.



northern Iraq by compelling Baghdad to draw forces away from the southern war front, weakening Iraqi defenses around strategic targets there.

The increased insurgent activity also reflects highly unusual cooperation among the deeply divided Kurdish rebel groups. the main groups—the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Jalal Talabani and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led by Mas'ud Barzani—now permit each other to conduct operations in their traditional areas. This cooperation probably stems from the Iranian-brokered “unification” meetings of Iraqi Kurdish dissidents held in Tehran last December. However, we believe deep splits among the Kurdish groups over ideological, tribal, leadership, and strategic issues will limit their ability to work together over the long run.

The most serious consequence of this upsurge in Kurdish fighting is its potential for weakening the southern front or producing substantially higher military casualties. Despite increased Iranian support to

The Challenge From the Kurds

insurgent operations by the main Kurdish dissident groups have intensified in recent months, reflecting in part increased levels of Iranian support. Tehran has provided the Kurds with greater quantities of supplies and more sophisticated weapons including shoulder-fired SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. During the past three months, there has been a sharp upsurge in combined Iranian-Kurdish operations against Iraqi military and economic targets. We believe that Iran, which has its own restive Kurdish community, is wary of its Kurdish allies but hopes to exploit the unstable situation in

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Jalal Talabani, Leader of the Marxist, 4,000-man strong Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. []



Ma'sud Barzani, Leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) which numbers 5,000 fighters of largely rural and tribal origins. []

the Kurds to achieve these aims, we believe that Iraq's troop redeployments to date have not significantly weakened its frontline positions, and military losses from Kurdish activities have been relatively minor. Baghdad recognizes that the demands of the war with Iran limit its ability to commit sufficient forces to crush the Kurdish insurgency as it did in 1975. The Saddam regime appears content for now to keep open the vital oil facilities at Karkuk and the oil pipeline and road link to Turkey and to maintain a government presence in major northern cities. []

In keeping with his traditional carrot-and-stick security policy, Saddam began bludgeoning the Kurdish rebels in April in a campaign to remove Kurdish supporters from critical areas in the north. []

[] Baghdad razed dozens and possibly hundreds of villages and resettled villagers to largely Arab areas in the south. In addition, the government reportedly employed mustard gas on recalcitrant villages. []

Not surprisingly, the Kurds have resented the draconian measures that Baghdad has employed against them. [] some villagers and members of the Kurdish national defense battalions, whose loyalty had been at least temporarily bought by Baghdad, have joined the dissidents. We estimate that several thousand more Kurds have fled to Iran. []

Since late June Saddam has extended the carrot of reconciliation. [] negotiations have reopened with Talabani, although it sees no evidence that Baghdad will meet the PUK's demands for economic and political concessions that halted negotiations in late 1984. Saddam has restored his longtime Kurdish expert, Revolutionary Command Council Vice-Chairman Izzat Ibrahim, to preeminence in Kurdish affairs. Saddam had appointed his cousin and chief security officer, Ali Hasan al-Majid, to carry out the harsh measures, probably to avoid tarnishing the image of his Kurdish experts and hampering reconciliation efforts. []

[] Saddam is allowing lowland Kurds to return to towns near their destroyed villages but away from the main roads. []



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good for a country soon to enter its eighth year of war; while organized dissidence increases somewhat in the south, Saddam retains firm control:

- The government's reconciliation efforts reduce the level of defections to the rebels. Despite greater numbers, the rebels receive less support from remaining Kurdish villagers, who are wary of government retaliation.
- Rival Kurdish rebel groups are unable to sustain their limited cooperation in expanded and more effective guerrilla operations.
- Iraq successfully blunts Kurdish-Iranian operations on the front and behind the lines with acceptable casualties.
- Increased grumbling over the economy and casualties from the conventional and guerrilla wars does not translate into a major increase in organized dissident activity.
- Iran's military does not achieve a significant victory on the ground or produce a major breakthrough.

Alternative Scenario: Saddam's conciliatory efforts falter and he resumes the campaign of repression that fuels greater Kurdish guerrilla activity; the regime is forced to transfer additional forces from the Iranian front; morale problems increase as Iran exploits Kurdish successes and Baghdad's weaknesses and launches ground offensives on both the northern and southern fronts; increased casualties and austerity measures fuel an upsurge in dissident activity in the south:

- The number and scale of Kurdish guerrilla actions greatly increase, occasionally cutting main roads and damaging oil facilities in the north.

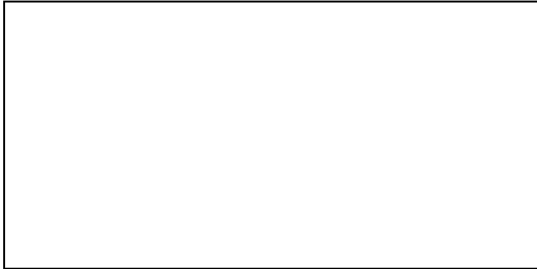
Key Indicators To Watch

Most Likely Scenario: The Kurdish insurgency continues with somewhat greater intensity than last year but achieves only limited gains in the mountainous regions; the government retains control of major cities, the oil pipelines and main roads; popular morale in the rest of Iraq remains low, but reasonably

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- Turkey—concerned over Kurdish attacks on the oil pipeline and the road link to Turkey and fearful that growing unrest in Iraq will lead to further violence from its own large Kurdish community—increases military cooperation with Baghdad against Iraqi Kurds.



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